We can make airport security faster and more secure – Commentary by Tony Tyler; IATA’s Director General & CEO
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It is no secret that one of the biggest passenger gripes about air travel is long lines at airport security checkpoints. Over the years, we have added so many requirements to the airport checkpoint that throughput has fallen from an average of 350 passengers per hour pre-9.11 to just 149 today. With ever increasing passenger numbers, we need to find a way to get people through security more efficiently—and of course with no compromise on effectiveness. Solving that problem is not just a matter of adding checkpoints.

There is a solution. For the past two years, the International Air Transport Association (IATA), whose 240 airline members carry 84% of world air traffic, has been working with industry partners to develop a Checkpoint of the Future with the long term aim of enabling passengers to walk through a security checkpoint without stopping, removing items of clothing and liquids, or taking computers out of bags.

Moving passengers through checkpoints more swiftly will reduce the need for additional checkpoints. And the best part is that it will actually improve security. The key is to transition from today’s one-size-fits-all approach to a risk-based model that enables security providers to focus their resources where they are most needed.

Airline passengers are already seeing some of what the future holds. There are known traveler programs that enable certain fliers—who voluntarily agree to provide additional personal information—to use dedicated screening lanes to speed their trip. IATA estimates that these so-called “known traveler” lanes can improve checkpoint throughput by 30%. Creating a separate screening area for those travelers requiring additional attention will boost efficiency another 4-5%. That is a 34-35% increase in passenger processing capability, without adding infrastructure. Although these known traveler programs are new to the security side, they are already being used to facilitate immigrations and customs processing for international air travel.

Another element of the CoF vision is bringing passenger data to the checkpoint that is already being used by many governments for purposes of immigration processing. This data, known as Advanced Passenger Information (API) will help to ensure each individual receives the appropriate level of screening before beginning an air journey.

As these concepts are adopted, within a few years more travelers could see shorter lines and a more streamlined experience, with fewer hassles. We are making progress: Working with stakeholders across industry and government, IATA is conducting real world trials of important future checkpoint technology.
By 2014, plans are to conduct a demonstration of a CoF at a major international airport. In five years or so, we will be saying good-bye to one-size fits all security, as the risk-based model becomes the norm around the world. The final piece, developing and deploying stand-off screening systems to enable the walk-through experience we all desire will take up to 10 years. We know we won’t get there tomorrow, but the building blocks are being put in place for a better experience for passengers.

IATA represents some 240 airlines comprising 84% of global air traffic.